



March 3, 2016

TECHNICAL GUIDE NOTICE NO. 406

SUBJECT: ECS-Environmental Evaluation (CPA-52) Guidance for Conservation Activity Plans

Purpose: To provide revised guidance on completing the Environmental Evaluation (CPA-52) for Conservation Activity Plans (CAPs).

Background: The General Manual states that an Environmental Evaluation (EE) form CPA-52 "will be conducted for all NRCS planning activities" (GM 180, Part 409.2(H)).

Explanation: All program applications are required to be supported by an NRCS approved conservation plan, which provides documentation of the practices that could be used to address the natural resource concerns identified during the planning process. In the past, Kentucky NRCS guidance allowed for a CAP CPA-52 template to be used to satisfy the requirement of the policy referenced above. Recently received National guidance no longer allows for the use of these CAP templates. In order to comply with this guidance, all CAP CPA-52 templates have been removed from Section II of the Field Office Technical Guide and are no longer authorized for use.

Action:

Follow the steps below in order to complete the CPA-52 for CAPs:

Step 1 –As part of the conservation planning process, planners will complete the CPA-52 based on the current conditions of the planning unit. All resource concerns identified as well as alternatives that adequately address those concerns will be documented on the CPA-52. A CAP may be identified as an alternative to address a specific resource concern(s). Since the development of a conservation plan is considered Conservation Technical Assistance and not a federal action, the Responsible Federal Official (RFO) should make the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) finding "not a federal action" in Section Q of the CPA-52.

Step 2 –The conservation plan provides the basis for a producer to apply for financial assistance for a CAP. If the source of financial assistance to fund the CAP will be from the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), at the time of application for the CAP, the RFO should revise the CPA-52 by changing the NEPA finding to "a federal action ALL of which is categorically excluded" in Section Q of the CPA-52 and define USDA Categorical Exclusion #6 in Section R.2 of the CPA-52.

Step 3 – A Technical Service Provider (TSP) will develop the CAP. The TSP may utilize the NRCS completed CPA-52 as a source of information when developing the CAP. NRCS reviews the completed CAP using the CAP checklist and certifies payment. If in the future, the producer makes a decision to apply for EQIP financial assistance to implement conservation practices identified in the CAP, the RFO will need to complete Step 4.

Step 4 –Revise the CPA-52 from Step 2 as needed based on the information provided in the CAP. Revisions will typically include, but are not limited to:

- Section F. Resource Concerns and Existing/Benchmark Conditions -to include all CAP benchmark conditions and resource concerns not previously documented.
- Section I. Effects of Alternatives- to include all CAP planned conservation practices and effects not previously documented.
- Section J. Impacts to Special Environmental Concerns-to account for environmental impacts of the CAP planned conservation practices not previously documented.

The RFO will complete Section Q and Section R of the CPA-52 as appropriate. This CPA-52 supports the conservation plan that will be developed.

If you have questions related to this bulletin, please contact Casey Shrader, State Biologist at 859-224-7372 or casey.shrader@ky.usda.gov.



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